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RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 1829
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 4244
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4827
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 002971

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SUBJECT: JAPANESE ANGST ABOUT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON NORTH
KOREAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reason: 1.4 (b) (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Most Japanese media, academic and political sources cite A/S Hill's June 21-22 Pyongyang visit as a first step toward denuclearizing the DPRK. Some observers, however, remain skeptical about the DPRK's intention to shut down its nuclear facilities, and there is widespread worry over A/S Hill's bilateral contact with the DPRK. Although several sources tell Embassy Tokyo they view A/S Hill's Pyongyang visit as intentionally downplaying the abduction issue and leaving Japan out of Six-Party negotiations, this notion has been rebutted by Prime Minister Abe and mitigated by A/S Hill's continuing "celebrity" status in Japan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Overall media coverage of A/S Hill's Pyongyang visit was positive, but analysts believe that it is unlikely the DPRK will dismantle its nuclear facility without making unreasonable demands in future negotiations. A Mainichi editorial said that while it appeared A/S Hill took some preliminary steps toward dismantling North Korea's nuclear program, "actions are more important than words." Foreign Minister Aso reflected that skepticism in a June 22 press conference, observing that A/S Hill's visit to North Korea would not immediately settle things. Prime Minister Abe offered a similarly guarded public statement on June 25, saying Japan must carefully monitor whether North Korea will actually carry out that action.

¶3. (C) Other editorials expressed concern with what they claimed to be an attempt to exclude the abduction issue from the Six-Party process. Asahi observed that Japan has little direct contact with Pyongyang, forcing Tokyo to stake its only chance for achieving success on the abduction issue on progress in the bilateral dialogue between the U.S. and North Korea. Mainichi reporter Koichi Yonemura took a different tack, telling us it was widely recognized in Japan that to mix the nuclear and abduction issues was illogical and inconsistent.

¶4. (C) DPRK expert Hajime Izumi of Shizuoka University told Embassy Tokyo that A/S Hill's visit to Pyongyang, because it took place before the shutdown of the nuclear facilities,

called into question the legitimacy of Six-Party discussions and gave the international community an excuse to criticize the visit.⁸ Meanwhile, Masaharu Nakagawa, Deputy Chairman of DPJ Abduction Issue Strategy, warned that if the U.S. continued its bilateral dialogue with North Korea, the Six-Party Talks might become a facade.

15. (C) On June 24, Prime Minister Abe publicly dismissed reports that Japan had been kept in the dark about A/S Hill's mission and stressed that Japan and the U.S. have an unshakable alliance.⁸ Tadasu Yano, Policy Secretary to LDP Councilor Ichita Yamamoto, told us that the LDP was generally satisfied with A/S Hill's visit to Pyongyang. Finally, media contacts have observed that concern over A/S Hill's Pyongyang visit has also been mitigated by his continuing celebrity status in Japan.
SCHIEFFER